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28 September 1966

MEMORANDUM

Recent Vietnamese Communist Statements on Peace Terms

Pham Van Dong's 24 September Speech

1. In our view, the remarks in Pham Van Dong's 24 September speech on Vietnam were intended primarily as an unqualified, but somewhat unofficial, rejection of the Goldberg proposals before the UN. We do not believe, despite some new language by Dong, that the speech reveals any substantive change in Hanoi's position on starting talks or a solution to the war. We find it interesting that Pham used the occasion of a speech which included several other subjects as the vehicle for his rejection. It appears that this may have been designed to avoid giving the impression of a full, government reply to Goldberg. The DRV rejects any intrusion of the UN into the Vietnam problem, and thus may not want to compromise its position in any way by an official Foreign Ministry reply to proposals presented before the UN. So far, no official government statement has been forthcoming.

2. We find Dong's remarks on Vietnam particularly hard line. He not only flatly rejected the UN as an arbiter, but he cited Ho Chi Minh's tough statement of 17 July 1966 as an illustration of Vietnamese policy, stressed the necessity to "fight" and defeat the US in order to gain a satisfactory settlement, and reiterated that the DRV's four points and the Front's five points are the "only" base for a peaceful solution in Vietnam. His speech, in fact, was about the opposite of Rafaelli's highly inaccurate interpretation of it in an AFP dispatch from Hanoi.

3. Among the other hard-line aspects of Pham's speech is his interesting phraseology regarding the fact that the US "must recognize the NFLSV as their interlocutor



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to solve all questions in South Vietnam." This seems to be a repetition in new words of the frequent DRV insistence in the past that the US must "deal directly" with the Front if it wants to negotiate, and that the Front's program must form the basis for postwar political arrangements in South Vietnam. It is not, therefore, a new substantive aspect of Hanoi's public position on settling the war.

4. We have, however, received a number of indications that Hanoi's position on the Front is not as hard in practice as it is in public. There is enough evidence, we believe, to indicate that if we ever reached the stage of multilateral negotiations, Hanoi would be willing to back away from its maximum position that the Front must be the sole representative of South Vietnam. We do not, however, think Dong's hard-line reiteration of Hanoi's maximum position on this point represents an actual hardening of Hanoi's private view.

5. We think, instead, that Dong felt it necessary to be tough on the point, mainly because of Goldberg's suggestion that Front representation at peace talks would not pose an "insurmountable" problem. Goldberg's position, although it is not new in US proposals, may in Hanoi's view have some attraction throughout the free world and result in pressure on the Vietnamese Communists to compromise. Thus, they would want to put forth once again their maximum position in tough terms to discourage any pressure for compromise. We think it unlikely that the Vietnamese Communists will ever show any public give in their position on the Front until a stage is reached in which the issue has to be resolved. They will wish, until the proper time, to preserve the maximum negotiating position.

6. DRV sensitivity on the question of any premature concessions concerning the Front is probably the reason behind a long commentary on the issue broadcast by Hanoi on 27 September. There has been a rash of broadcasts on peace terms in the last few days by both the DRV and the NFLSV--following a period of relative quiet on the subject by their spokesmen. These broadcasts are almost certainly a countereffort to the Goldberg proposals.



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The Nguyen Huu Tho Interview

7. In our judgment, the interview between Burchett and National Front chairman Nguyen Huu Tho reveals no substantive change in the Front's position on negotiation, or on a final settlement of the war. There seems to be, first of all, no significant difference between the version broadcast in Vietnamese by the Front and the Hanoi version broadcast in English on 26 September. Although Tho describes the Front as the only "legal" representative of the South Vietnamese and Hanoi terms the NFLSV the only "genuine" representative, language specialists tell us that the Vietnamese word used in the sentence has both meanings.

8. This is not the first time that a Front spokesman has used a three-point formula for setting forth the NFLSV terms for a "solution" to the war. Thus, we do not believe this means the Front is abandoning the five-point proposal it laid out in March of 1965, or is amending it. The Front representative in Peking, for example, gave a Japanese newsman a three-point formulation, using essentially the same terms as Tho, in November 1965.

Front spokesmen, moreover, have often used other shorter formulations in setting forth the Front's position and, subsequent to Tho's interview, the Front has reiterated its insistence that the US "approve" the five-point proposal of the NFLSV.

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9. Our feeling is that Tho probably put the Front terms in a three-point formula for two main reasons: first, the exact terms of the old five-point proposal were difficult to sort out from the rambling statement in which it was published. Front leaders now have a clear-cut statement to which they can refer, perhaps in private conversations, but it is still nicely unofficial and does not specifically undercut the original five-point proposal. Secondly, Tho may have had in mind giving an appearance of closer identity between the Front's position and that of Hanoi as expressed in the DRV's four points. Tho's three-point formula contains all the essential ingredients of the DRV's four-point position. While this is also true of the Front's five-point statement, the language of the latter is considerably less precise and gives the appearance of a greater difference of view. We do not believe Tho's



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action reflects any real movement between Hanoi and the Front, since we continue to believe the NFLSV is completely dominated by the North Vietnamese.

10. The only significant difference, when the verbiage is stripped away, between Tho's three points and the Front's five points is that Tho does not make US withdrawal a flat precondition for negotiations. The NFLSV's five-point statement, by contrast, said that "at present, all negotiations are useless" on the war as long as the US "imperialists do not withdraw all troops, weapons," etc., from South Vietnam. The fact of the matter is, however, that Tho's apparently intentional effort to edge away from the Front's original hard-line position and closer to Hanoi's stand is not the first instance in which a Front representative or propaganda broadcast has made such a move. Although the hard-line five point position has occasionally been repeated, the Front has also on occasion, by omission, implied that negotiations could be begun prior to implementation of a US withdrawal. The interview quoted above by the Front representative in Peking, for example, took this position in almost the same words as Tho.

11. We believe the Vietnamese Communists will continue to surround their terms in a welter of seemingly conflicting commentary which is calculated, in part, to keep the West guessing. The Communists see this mainly as an effort to preserve their flexibility. There is no indication, however, that their basic terms have changed. We believe these are best expressed in Hanoi's four points and that Hanoi's position will be the deciding one if the Vietnamese Communists decide to move toward a political settlement.

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MEMORANDUM FOR: [REDACTED] for the  
Honorable W. Averell Harriman

Attached is an annex to the memorandum of  
26 September entitled "North Vietnam's Four  
Points" forwarded to you earlier.

EX/OCIO - 28 Sept. 1966  
(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101  
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

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This is actually an annex to the 26 September  
memo on "North Vietnam's Four Points" sent to [redacted]

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[redacted] for Harriman.

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